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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

14 October 1983

US Forces in Korea -- The North's Position

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We believe P'yongyang regards the withdrawal of US forces from South Korea as the key to its longstanding goal of reunification on its terms.

- The North correctly sees the US troops between Seoul and the Demilitarized Zone as a tripwire guaranteeing the commitment of additional US forces and weapons in the event of a new war.
- We believe this symbol and guarantee of US support is the most effective deterrent to a North Korean attack.

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The North has tried a variety of tactics over the years to encourage US troop withdrawals.

- In the late 1960s the North instigated violent clashes with South Korean and US forces near the Demilitarized Zone, and attacked US reconnaissance elements off North Korea's east coast. P'yongyang apparently hoped the United States, then heavily committed in Southeast Asia, would be intimidated by the prospect of renewed hostilities in Korea and withdraw its forces.
- In the early 1970s P'yongyang portrayed itself as the more reasonable and peace-loving of the two Koreas. North Korea's leaders hoped the US would withdraw its forces in response to this apparent decrease in the

This memorandum was prepared by the Office of East Asian Analysis in support of President Reagan's East Asian trip.

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EA M 83/10211

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C05166991: DIF

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threat from the North. At the same time P'yongyang launched a massive and secret military buildup that still continues.

- In recent years the North has pursued a mix of tactical initiatives ranging from propaganda charging that the US presence is the main source of tension on the peninsula to periodic probes for bilateral talks with the United States. [redacted]

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P'yongyang insists that its forces are much smaller than US estimates and that they are only for defense. P'yongyang trumpets its avowed fear of invasion most loudly during the joint US-South Korean Team Spirit exercises each spring. We believe there is an element of genuine concern in the North about these exercises, but P'yongyang also uses the maneuvers to reinforce harsh political controls at home and to score propaganda points abroad.

- During last spring's Team Spirit exercise, P'yongyang protested more vigorously than it ever had, placing its entire population into what it termed a "semi-war" state. [redacted]

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